

Judge who the author
From the Author

P R I N C I P L E S
O F

ORDER AND HAPPINESS

UNDER THE
BRITISH CONSTITUTION.

IN A
D I A L O G U E

BETWEEN
OUR PARISH CLERK AND THE 'SQUIRE.

"The Laws of England are wise, they are just, they are moderate
" Laws. They give to God, they give to Cæsar, they give to
" the Subject, that which appertaineth." LORD BACON.

L O N D O N :

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С А Д И С И Й

САДИСИЙ ОБЩЕСТВО
СОЗДАНИЯ ПРОДУКТОВ

СОЗДАНИЯ ПРОДУКТОВ

Л. К.

D I A L O G

ПРИЧИНА

OUR LARGEST CITY AND THE GOVERNMENT

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ПОДОБНО

ПРИЧИНА ДЛЯ ПОДОБНОГО

ПРИЧИНА

DIALOGUE, &c.

Clerk. SIR, you are welcome home again. I made bold to call, to ask how you liked the meeting yesterday. I hope it was a noble one. We had a grand bonfire on our green, and many huzzas to the glorious memory of King William.

Squire. I begin to wish I had staid at home to hear them. I was not so pleased as I expected, at this anniversary in London.

C. You disappoint me in saying so. May I take the liberty to ask, how you liked the constitutional toasts of the day?

S. I should have liked them very well, if they had been constitutional. Many of them were wantonly audacious, and offended me extremely.

C. I am sorry, sir, to find you return to the country so dissatisfied. I fear you heard some ill news in town. With your pardon for this interruption, I'll take my leave.

B

S. No,

'S. No, prithee stay friend. I wish that all my neighbours, as well as yourself, should know the cause of it. I did really hear very bad news in town. Should you like to live in France?

C. Perhaps when they have settled matters, and come to brew as good ale as we, it might not be a bad country; but just now, I would as lief jump into a fiery furnace.

'S. What would you say to those, who would bring this furnace into our parish?

C. God forbid! I hope that is not the news you bring. Your language used to be a little on the other side.

'S. My sentiments are much changed since yesterday; and I have pleasure in telling it to you, as you have several sticklers for the French at the parish club.

C. May I ask, sir, what has happened?

'S. You know, my ill health has prevented my going to London, for some years; but feeling myself strong again, I resolved to attend the revolution dinner once more, and shake hands with some old friends at that meeting. I went with the same spirits as formerly, to celebrate the memory of King William, and make a cheerful day of it. But the people seemed to me to have changed their language and faces. I could not see one of my old acquaintance; and, instead of talking of the blessings of our own constitution, I heard nothing but applause of the French proceedings, and recommendations to follow their example.

C. Perhaps you mistook the tavern. I have heard of a meeting advertised to celebrate the French revolution.

'S. They would have dealt more fairly by their guests, if they had given that name to this. I could forgive a few republican toasts in the jollity of good liquor, if that were all. But the set I happened to mix with, were actually

actually crying down our glorious revolution, as a clumsy piece of patch-work, unworthy of the nation ; affecting to prefer the acts of the mob-government of France, and wishing to introduce it here.

C. Did you know any of the party ?

'S. No : I watched their words, in expectation of hearing broken English from them. I ventured to ask one who sat next me, if he was serious ; and upon his saying yes, I replied, " Then, sir, I fancy you have not much to lose in the scuffle."

C. What did he answer ?

'S. He laughed in my face, and whispered, " I have every thing to get." This made me think my pockets too near him, and I shifted my quarters to another end of the table. There I found conversation of the same kind, which disgusted me, and I came away.

C. I don't know what to think of this flander of the revolution. Surely you must have got among some Papists.

'S. I cannot tell what they were. A few Presbyterian parsons, whom I remember there on a former occasion, holding a different language ; a lawyer, whose name I never heard before, with a man lately fined in the exchequer for smuggling, seemed to take the lead in giving out the toasts. Oh ! it has made me sick of revolution dinners ; I am a convert from this day.

C. I hope not. We may be grateful to King William, and dutiful to King George. He that loves his country will connect both together.

'S. But what has the French revolution to do with either ?

C. I don't much understand French politics : yet I wish them success in their revolution.

'S. They are gone beyond that now, and wish to bring their own confusion and horrors into this happy land.

C. What can they hope for in so doing?

'S. They cannot believe, but that we must serve them now, as they served us in the American war, and take advantage of their divisions. Having outraged all principles of public justice, they think every man's hand must be against them; the common sentiment of bad men, from Cain downwards. Therefore they would make us like themselves.

C. That is a Devilish principle. I'll hope it can't be true. They ought to thank us for letting them alone. But for all that, I wish them joy of their new constitution, if it does them any good. And if we can improve our own by it, why should not we?

'S. Let us see the end of it. They remind me of an experimental farmer, adjoining to my estate in Norfolk, practising his own inventions in husbandry, at great loss and expence. Though he wore out his land, he had nothing in his barn to shew for it. You might generally see him hurrying about, quarrelling with his men, and changing them often. The neighbours complained of him for being troublesome. He was always behind hand with his rent, and at last ran away, leaving his family on the parish.

C. But if he had sent more corn to market than your tenant——

'S. I question if we shall ever see that in our time in France. However, let them do their best; I do not envy them. But if they attempt to impose their nonsense of reformation upon us, as they have been inclined to do of late, we must teach them that their wares are mere French

French frippery, flimsy, and unsound; as unfit for English palates as their soup meagre.

C. Say you so? I have heard that they boast of as good a Bill of Rights as ours.

'S. Paine calls ours a Bill of *Wrongs*, made to insult us.

C. Indeed? I am sure if I had heard that read from his book, I'd have gone out of the room. I have always been a supporter of the Bill of Rights. But have not the French now, as good a constitution as ours?

'S. Judge of the tree by its fruit. Can they turn it to as good use, or any good at all? That's the true question, neighbour. We see more injustice practised by them to each other, than any history can shew. The accounts we daily hear, convince me, that whatever laws they may have in writing, they have none in use, but that of the club and sword, and that none but the strongest get the benefit of them. Now, I think, the merit of having a good constitution, is, when every man can enjoy his own, and none take it from him.

C. 'Tis certain ours is an excellent constitution, but then it wants mending all over. There are books going about, that say so in plain terms, and encourage the people to set about it. Now, if there were not some truth in this, why have not our ministers and magistrates put them down?

'S. You find by the Proclamation, that measures are taken for the purpose. Perhaps they trusted too much to the good sense of the nation, till they found our good nature had been too easily imposed upon.

C. Why do you call it imposition? I know some learned men and scholars that think the same. There's my neighbour, the schoolmaster, wanted us at the club, to begin a society for reforming the constitution. It did

not go down with all, but I was half inclined to set my name for one.

'S. Perhaps you will think better of it. But what makes him set up for a reformer?

C. He received a letter from some great folks in London, signed by a member of parliament, recommending themselves as a society for reformation; and a package, carriage paid, full of books and printed papers, directed to him by his own name at length, with the member's compliments to him. One of them was Paine's book upon the Rights of Man, which he frequently read to the club.

'S. Did those readings induce you to second his wishes?

C. We should not have thought of the subject, but for that.

'S. Then, I hope, your own feelings did not lead you to complain of evils in the exercise of our constitution. The government had not become burthensome to you.

C. One does not always feel one's burthens. I think we pay very heavy taxes; and my neighbour says, we stand in need of French reformation: For that if the Rights of Man were established, we should have a better government.

'S. A reformation that would improve our government, or reduce our taxes, would be welcome to all. But it would not be French, nor founded on the Rights of Man: It must be the work of time, and English good sense. I fear you adopt words by rote, and without consideration. Surely you cannot wish to see your own country a prey to the calamities of France.

C. Indeed I do not. I am attached to our own constitution, but want to correct what is bad in it.

S. That

'S. That is a reasonable wish. Yet I think there is much indecency, in every private man's setting up for a statesman in these days; to mend the constitution, instead of trying to live happily under it. But if you will needs be busy in these matters, why do you express yourself in such doubtful and dangerous terms?

C. I hear them often talked of, and the words stay by me.

'S. Perhaps those from whom you heard them, have meant no more than yourself, and did not understand them. If they did, it is your duty as an honest man and good subject, to avoid their company. Have you considered, that this doctrine of the Rights of Man tends directly to the subversion of our constitution, in all its parts, and not to reform it?

C. No, I don't mean that; I want a reform of parliament, and fewer taxes. Might not means be found of succeeding so far?

'S. Not according to the Rights of Man; for that scheme would leave us no parliament to reform. Your endeavours, then, would be like physic sent with the undertaker's man, wrapt up in the coffin. Paine tells us, that we have no constitution at all; that our parliament is a mockery, not worth reforming; and that the people ought to make a new constitution to suit themselves. Now as greater expences would be wanting, to support a new government than an old one, (as they find to their cost in France) I do not see how that would lessen our taxes.

C. But is this really the doctrine of Paine's book?

'S. It is; and you see France practising it. Then you have not read the book?

C. I have only heard some parts of it read, as I told you. I did not think it contained such mischief.

'S. The chief novelty in it, besides the title, is the mischief. There was a book called Oceana, written in the time of Oliver Cromwell, which contains all that this book does in favour of a republic, in better terms, with less trash. That had its day too, and is forgotten; but the miseries of those times are well remembered, which make us Englishmen dread their return. Paine cannot forgive this country for prospering after the loss of America, and has written his book in a spirit of revengeful malice against us, on that account; and more especially against our King, for becoming popular after that event. His soul of discord made him a favourite in America, when confusion reigned there; but since order has been restored, they have been glad enough to part with him.

C. I thought his writings had tended to establish the rights of man there, and that those commonwealths succeeded very well upon that principle.

'S. By no means. Their leaders talked to the people in these terms in the beginning, to excite them to resistance, and the overthrow of established government, for which they are well enough contrived. But the Americans are a shrewd and cunning people, and knew that these were mere empty sounds, upon any other service. Therefore when they came to settle their constitutions after the peace, they took a better, and the only sure foundation to work upon, experience. From this they had learnt, that our constitution contained more good in it than any other in the world; and therefore they generally adopted it, for the model of their several commonwealths.

wealths. There is no good principle-in any of them that is not English.

C. Then how comes it that they have no King?

'S. They have no supreme head by that name; but their President of Congress has the power of a King. Cromwell exercised more power by the name of *Protector*, than Charles had to lose as *King*. Names do not much signify, in the true scale of things. The Americans have sent no congratulations to France, upon the downfall of monarchy. If they have any gratitude, they might shew it now, to their *Great and Good Ally* in his distress.

C. What then is all this talk about the Rights of Man?

'S. Will you tell me before I answer, what you meant in using the expression?

C. I meant no more than a right to be well governed, according to the true principles of the constitution I live under.

'S. Then you are in direct opposition to Paine; because he would have you believe that those principles are bad in themselves, and cannot possibly give you good government.

C. What! no good government under the laws of England! Fine talk indeed! He might as well persuade me that I am not Clerk of this Parish.

'S. It is mere idle talk. The grand principle of it is that all men are born equal, and *therefore* there must be no distinctions among us. Now, there is no new discovery in teaching us, that we are all born equal; for every midwife could have taught him the same. If men always continued in the same state as at their birth, and never left their cradles, I would agree with him in all his conclusions from this grand discovery.

C. Yet

C. Yet we remain the same human beings ever after.

'S. Just so, my good friend; you have used the only word applicable to the subject. We remain the same HUMAN creatures; and therefore always equal in respect of God our creator, who is no respecter of persons. If we continued naked animals, subsisting like wild beasts, the same equality might serve for our regulation. Consider your own family; you have several children.

C. Yes, and a good wife.

'S. Do you give her the same authority in your family as yourself?

C. You are joking. No wife ought to have the same power as a husband.

'S. Why not?

C. Because she is a woman.

'S. But if equality continued from our birth, we have no right to make that distinction. A woman is born equal to a man. There have been many queens and empresses, who have governed mighty empires prosperously. Upon the authority of Paine's book, a lady has lately published as good a one, to uphold the Rights of Women: So that we husbands must look about us.

C. We will not encourage that book at the Club.

'S. Certainly, if women can govern kingdoms well, they might rule our houses and families equally well. But it is ordered otherwise.

C. It seems as if this order of things depended on some other cause.

'S. It depends on a law of society, as antient as the beginning of social intercourse. But if the women of this day should incline to change it, they might, according to that doctrine,

C. We

C. We ought to prevent it, for it would throw all things into confusion.

'S. Then you agree, that our being born equal does not decide this question?

C. I think not. But what has that to do with the constitution of England?

'S. Attend a little, and we will consider further. I presume that, as a father, you take due care of your children, and expect duty and obedience from them.

C. Certainly.

'S. But they were born your equals, and as good as you.

C. How can a child be equal to his father?

'S. He is the same human creature. If you should not see him from his birth up to manhood, you would not know him to be your son. He is under no natural or moral obligation to you for begetting him.

C. No, but he is for my supporting and educating him.

'S. True, and so is your parish apprentice. These obligations arise long after his birth, in consequence of a social establishment, which keeps families together. You consider them to be the more obliged to you, the more care you take of them.

C. Yes ; and if I were to be cruel to them, or neglect them, I think they might leave me without blame.

'S. How many have you?

C. Five ; three sons and two daughters, mostly grown up.

'S. If they should endeavour to take the management of your house to themselves, you would think it unnatural, and prevent them.

C. It would be undutiful, and against law.

'S. Five

'S. Five are more than two. They might tell you so, and that they were born your equals; that they disliked the order of your family, in which the Rights of Children were not enough respected, and would regulate it according to the sentiments of their own majority. What would you do?

C. The law of the land would enable me to keep order in my own house.

'S. Then you would not teach them to make new laws, according to the precepts of the Rights of Man?

C. If there are any such precepts in the book, they are very absurd.

'S. Here likewise you find it necessary to look for support, to the established law of society, and not to the law of nature. Whatever natural rights or duties belong to us, can affect us only as far as we remain natural persons, without reference to the laws of this or that community.

C. Then have we Englishmen no natural rights?

'S. Yes; but a Frenchman or Swede has the same. We have a right to enjoy the laws of our native land. This was declared by the Act of Settlement, (the law by which our present Royal family succeeded to the Crown) to be our *birth-right*. In that sense only; is it a natural right: For every benefit derived from hence, under the laws, is therefore a civil and constitutional, not a natural right, and is connected with relative duties, which we owe to the State in return. For instance; we do not bring into the world with us the privilege of Trial by Jury, but find it established. It is not attached to our persons, for we cannot have the benefit of it beyond sea. It is the law of this kingdom only, and therefore a civil institution. But if it arose out of natural rights, we should find it in Morocco. One man cannot have any natural

natural rights, different from another man's. An African's are the same as yours. This truth puzzled the French extremely, when they began to frame their declaration of the Rights of Man, as the foundation of a new constitution. An orator being asked if he included Negroes in that declaration, answered No; to which it was replied, "Then you ought to speak only of the Rights of *White* men."

C. Did he adopt the alteration?

'S. No; he and his party became inflamed with anger, and never forgave their opponent for this plain question.

C. Yet, to be sure, a black man and white man are born equal. Then if a free constitution of government is not derived from natural rights, whence comes its excellency? For I remember a passage of Paine's to prove, that there can be no freedom without them.

'S. Our ancestors, who began the glorious struggle for liberty against the Stuart kings, seem to have laid a better foundation for our civil rights and liberties, when they asserted them, by the famous Petition of Right, to be according to the laws and statutes of this realm. I desire to go no higher for my security. Those natural rights, whatever they may be, are placed by their new champion above all Law; so that he directly contradicts Mr. Locke, (whom we are not yet prepared to exchange for him) who says, *Where there is no Law, there is no freedom.* We know what directs us, when we refer to the law of the land; and can find therein a good portion of liberty and protection, for all occasions; but there is no book or statute of these natural rights of man, where we can get as much of either as will serve for daily use, in common life. The law of society seems, indeed, in its nature,

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to be repugnant to them : For in the whole history of mankind, we have no account of any set of men living together by them alone, or in a state of nature ; but by *some* social compact, howsoever faint it may be. This their law, or constitution, can only be formed by the suppression of the natural powers or rights of individuals, and by their subordination to that system of society, which directs their way of life. The truth of this notion is further proved by the conduct of other animals, who like Man form societies. We observe it among the Bees, Ants, and Rooks. And as it is reasonable to believe, that mankind likewise must have practised the principles of society, before they could understand the causes of them, any system of government, that is accommodated to the practical habits of men, is more likely to be good, than the best and justest theory. I know of no rule for judging of the excellence of a constitution of government, but according to its fitness, in this manner, to procure order and happiness to its subjects. These are the chief ends of government : And the experience of these blessings is the test of that fitness.

C. But are there any governments in existence which pursue these ends ?

'S. The constitution of these kingdoms is one, in which the happiness of the people is more the object of the government, than in any political institution which we know.

C. That may be the case, and yet it may admit of great improvements.

'S. It would be arrogance and folly in any man to deny that.

C. Then why should we not set about the trial ?

'S. Because

'S. Because when a thing has been found by long experience to be good, there is a chance of making it worse by alteration. And although there is a chance likewise, of making it better, we ought to be very sure of our plan, before we venture to give up a positive good, for that mere chance of better; because we should give up a certainty for an uncertainty, at the best. I have made up my mind on this subject, upon the strength of the old proverb, *One bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*

C. There is much good sense in the proverb. I wish you could convince me, that it relates to the subject of our conversation.

'S. That will not be difficult to any, but those who find fault for want of other employment. I believe no Englishman, who has had the means of knowing the constitutions of other countries, ever found any to be compared with his own.

C. I have understood that to be the case.

'S. Then we begin with one of those advantages, that gives a relish to every other in life, that of comparison; which might serve of itself for ample satisfaction. In viewing the objects of this comparison, two are principally distinguished, in which no nation, antient or modern, ever equalled our own. These are, first, the equality of all ranks and orders, in payment of public taxes and contributing to the public service; in acquiring wealth and honours; in family connections, and in the enjoyment of social intercourse. And secondly, the regular and impartial administration of justice, upon the same principal of equality and subordination, among all ranks alike. We have none of those odious distinctions, by which one class of persons enjoys a privilege, that becomes burthensome to the rest. Whatever tax is imposed,

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is paid in the same proportion by every man, from the greatest noble to the lowest clown. (Except indeed, that the endeavours of the legislature have been uniformly exerted, for many years past, to relieve the poorer sort from their burthen~~s~~, as much as possible). Whoever exercises his industry or his talents, is sure to enjoy the profits of both. Every subject, however lowly born, may obtain rank and title, if he is thought worthy of them.

C. That's true enough, indeed. There's Blaze, the weaver's son, got to be an Alderman of London, and was made a Knight the other day: and they say he is to be chosen a parliament man.

'S. There is nothing to prevent his marrying a Duke's daughter, if she should think him worthy of her. Then, as to the due course of Justice in this kingdom, what man is so poor and abject, that the greatest can injure him with impunity? What man is so elevated in rank or power, as to be able to commit a crime, without being brought to punishment? We all know instances within our own observation of this truth. These are some of the admirable effects of our trial by Jury, the strongest pillar of our constitution. Herein we have real benefits of an equality of persons, in all the essential points of common life, and which every man can feel: for they are brought to actual practice, and do not depend upon fine words and sentences. I question whether we shall see any thing to compare with this, produced by talking of the Rights of Man.

C. Sir, I thank you for shewing me how to value these benefits of our constitution, which I have been stupid enough not to observe, though daily before me. I did not think, we Englishmen had been so much upon a footing of equality. I wish some of my friends could have heard

heard you. It would teach them that they are happier than they think.

'S. The benefits of our constitution extend equally to all. The very soil of England makes a freeman, as was proved in the case of Somerset the Negro. The degrees of rank, distinguishing one man above another, are so happily contrived, as not to interfere with the rights of individuals; and serve only to produce a system of order and scale of dignity, that is well calculated to support monarchy, upon which so much of the excellence of our constitution depends. Our noblemen, with their different titles, connect us commissioners with the King, and bring the King near to us.

C. I am pleased to hear you say that, for with all my zeal for reformation, I am hearty for my King; I don't like to separate King and Constitution.

'S. I do not doubt it, every good subject thinks the same. Monarchy in our constitution is like the keystone of an arch, that keeps the whole building together. It is the centre of a system, that renders the government of man most like that of the universe; which is formed altogether of various degrees of rank and excellence, from the highest to the lowest in every kind. Our countryman Pope expresses it finely in these lines:

" Order is heaven's first law, and this confess
 " Some are, and must be, greater than the rest;
 " More rich, more wise: But who infers from hence
 " That such are happier, shocks all common sense."

C. You have satisfied me upon the general system of our constitution, which is admirable: yet I am inclined to think, we want some of the stir of reformation in the particular points I mentioned to you.

'S. You talk of a stir of reformation, as if you thought

the people might take upon themselves to bring it about. I hope you know better how to demean yourself as a peaceable subject, in due submission to the laws. Obedience is due to them, as you expect from them protection, and as you value the privileges you enjoy under their authority.

C. Perhaps I have gone further than I intended. It was only in my words. In this country we all know and feel the good effects of order and obedience, which make our duty as subjects agreeable, and bring it constantly in view. If it were otherwise, the fresh example of France would make every thinking man shudder at the thoughts of public disorder. Yet, without infringement of the law, are there not measures to be taken, for redress of any public grievance?

'S. To be sure. There you find another excellence of our form of government. It is the right of the subject to petition parliament, or the King, for redress of grievances, and to state them fully. And the experience of a century proves, that when, in this manner, the sense of a majority of the nation is known, upon any subject of complaint, the wisdom and justice of the legislature have provided a remedy.

C. I do not pretend to know, how far the majority of the nation goes with me, in those I complained of, our taxes and representation in parliament. I should like to hear your opinion upon them.

'S. Are these all the grievances you can complain of?

C. One feels these most; I have not thought much of any other.

'S. Let us consider them a little.

C. They are bad enough without considering; the less consideration we give them the better,

'S. On the contrary, the more you examine the matter, the less you will find them evils. You speak of feeling them, when perhaps you should say, you hear of them, How have you ever felt them?

C. Don't we read of them continually?

'S. Just as I thought: You take up what others have said. Can you say, that you have ever been distressed by paying a tax?

C. Eh—! Not directly distressed, perhaps. I have always had enough to pay the collectors. I have been a collector myself.

'S. In the course of your collections, have you ever found it so?

C. Very seldom, to be sure; and when that is the case, we have generally remitted the charge, and the commissioners have told us we did right.

'S. Then instead of a hardship, there was a kindness occasioned.

C. But I remember very well, about the same time, 'twas near Christmas last, the shoemaker could not give his eldest boy a new coat, because I called on him for the rates; as I was forced to settle my book by the holidays.

'S. No doubt, we might all have more conveniences, if we had more money to spare. You must not expect, that the King is to maintain fleets and armies, and a due course of justice, to preserve the peace and good order of the nation, without our contributing to it. If you believe that you live under a government, better upon the whole than any other in the world, it is worth a high price; reckoning upon the rate of other articles which money can procure. If a large sum of money must be given for a good house, or estate, or trade, the means of enjoying them in comfort and security, are certainly va-

luable in the same proportion. Liberty and safety are worth paying largely for.

C. True, but the question is, in what proportion, and whether they might not be had for less than they now cost us. Consider the great expences of the crown and royal family.

'S. I know no better rule of proportion, than by comparison with other states in Europe, which we may consider as merchants dealing in the same article. Take our neighbours the Dutch, who have a free government, though not equal to our own. I understand that taxes there are as high, if not higher upon the whole, than in England. It is plain, therefore, that though our taxes are so high, the expences of monarchy are not the cause of it, since they are equally high in a republic. But I should not complain, if they were higher than in any other nation, as long as our constitution gives greater advantages. Besides, with respect to the crown, you ought to know, that its revenues arise chiefly from a bargain made with the nation, at the time of the restoration; when the King gave up many oppressive exactions out of landed estates, which were as much the private estate of the crown, as your burial fees are your own: and herein the nation was a great gainer. It was like buying out a public way over your field, for a small composition. Then we should consider, that these expences of the crown, or the civil list, are but in part for the maintenance of the King and his royal family. It may be said to be principally laid out upon the dignity and splendor of the nation. Out of this fund his majesty maintains his ministers, and all the great and inferior officers of state, through all the various departments. The embassies and negociations with foreign states, and the appointments of the Judges.

C. Does the King pay all this out of his own money ?
 'S. He does, together with many other public charges, which I am not able to enumerate.

C. Really, sir, I did not know it. I thank you for this information, and for the pains you have taken to undeceive me. I wish all who begin to complain, could learn in the same manner, how unreasonable it is, upon the slight knowledge we have of these matters.

'S. It should afford you greater comfort still to reflect, that a wise and provident minister is steadily pursuing a regular course, for the gradual reduction of our taxes, and of the great cause of them, the national debt.

C. Ah ! that national debt is a mill-stone about our necks.

'S. When I was a boy, now fifty years back, I often heard that said : But it has not pulled us under water yet. My father often called it a bladder that would burst some day or other ; yet, though it is monstrously swelled since, it is tight enough still. I cannot help thinking it more of a bladder than a mill-stone ; and that it helps much to bear us up.

C. How so ?

'S. It makes a ready security for money always at hand, without the expence and trouble of mortgage deeds, and the lawyer's bill. And you may get it out again, at a day's notice, to any amount, to serve a friend. Then it has enabled government to raise money readily, upon sudden emergencies.

C. Yes ; too readily sometimes, as witness the American war, by which it has been so much increased, and so many heavy taxes laid on.

'S. I agree with you ; but the evil is past. We will not rip open an old sore. The majority of the nation

were for it at first, and may blame themselves. Let us be thankful that we have had strength enough to recover from that wound, and to thrive as we do. On the other hand, all the rest of the national debt has been occasioned by expensive wars, for the security of our laws and liberty by the revolution, or to preserve the liberties of other nations, and the ballance of power in Europe ; till the war before the last, for the preservation of our colonies, who then proved how little they deserved it at our hands. If our national debt were reduced to a moderate size, it would be more of a convenience than a grievance, for the reasons I have mentioned.

C. I do not understand the subject ; but with respect to taxes, you have taught me how to make them sit easy : And I am willing to expect a considerable reduction of them, from the measures of the present administration. I wish I could hope, too, for some reform of parliament, through their endeavours.

S. Why should we not, if the measure is wise and just ? Let us consider that, though it requires wiser heads than ours to decide upon so great a scheme of politics. In my younger days, and since, I have been a great stickler for the reform of parliament ; but I have become less anxious about it, since I have coolly considered the state of our country, according to actual experience, and not upon speculation. Believe this for certain, that we cannot judge wisely of any thing which depends on the transactions of kingdoms, but by experience. Let me remind you, how some of the wisest men foretold our immediate ruin from the loss of the American colonies ; and how ready we all were to believe their prophecy.

C. Indeed that's true enough. But have not we experience to warrant us in this case ?

S. We

'S. We can observe defects in the representation ; but it is by reasoning only, and not experience, that we impute the evils complained of to those defects. It is possible that our reasoning may be defective.

C. To what other cause shall we attribute the foul jobbs practised in elections ?

'S. The bribery and other arts to gain a seat in parliament, by which some men raise themselves in the State, or acquire an indirect power over its operations, and sometimes abuse it, are not to be imputed solely to the faults in representation. We see these practices grossly carried on, in towns where the election right is as free and general as any schemer would establish. I impute much of this evil to a want of religion and good morals, and to the vicious habits of life, now become prevalent from this cause. With respect to the indirect or unfair ascendancy of particular characters, we have a striking example now before us in France, to shew (as the whole history of such democracies does) that the most democratic state of government is, at least, as open to these abuses as the most monarchical, and in a degree far more dangerous. Ambitious and bold men will always find means of elevation. It is the singular happiness of this country that such characters can obtain their highest aims, or fall most desperately in their career, without obstructing the ordinary course of government.

C. To what do you ascribe this steady temper of our constitution, in the maintenance of its principles, if there are such defects in the system of representation ?

'S. You ask a most difficult and comprehensive question, such as I am almost afraid to answer. I am inclined to think, the chief advantages of our free constitution arise, as much, from the effects of an impartial administration

ministration of justice in the trial by jury, with its attendant the liberty of the press; and from the general submission of all its subjects to the same laws, and the same taxes, in due proportion, as from their representation in parliament. It seems to be agreed, that the defects of that representation are more obvious, in the present time, than in any former period; and they never were generally complained of before. Yet it must be agreed likewise, that at this day, we actually enjoy more liberty, and more security than ever; and that there was much less of either, in those times, when the House of Commons formed a truer and juster representation of the people.

C. I wish you could make out this great advantage of our own time.

S. You shall confess it, from your own experience. The greatest philosopher and politician of the age he lived in, Lord Bacon, writing to King James the First, says of our laws, "They are wise, just, and moderate: They give to God, they give to Cæsar, they give to the Subject, that which appertaineth."

C. Aye, but you speak of past times. We are fallen off since.

S. You mistake; we have been improving our laws, almost continually since, in those points which are the subject of his praise. Insomuch that his words, which, at that time, were employed as a flattering compliment to please the king, and expressed more than a true description, do now give in plain truth, a wise, just, and moderate character of the laws of England. If that great man could revive at this day to see the change, he would be ashamed of his former ideas, and would add tenfold to the weight of every applauding syllable, of

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the passage I have quoted. Almost a century after this period, came the revolution, the glorious act of the establishment of our freedom ; and in another century since, many securities have been obtained to preserve it ; whence it is become incorporated in the manners and temper of the people. But I wander from the point I have undertaken to make good ; and without going over former reigns, we will now consider the present reign only, which you and I remember beginning.

C. And a happy time it was, till that Lord Bute spoiled all.

'S. What, think you, drove him from the ministry?

C. His being unpopular.

'S. Here then is an instance, and a strong one too, of the power of the people ; when their cry can induce a King to dismiss a favourite minister. In other times, there have been querries raised against public men, who have kept their places in spite of them. And we know instances of ministers having been disgraced for misconduct. But you would be puzzled now, to say for what breach of duty Lord Bute was obliged to retire. Is this an example in my favour ?

C. It seems so.

'S. You have not forgot the case of General Warrants. In all former reigns, they had been issued and executed as of course, and without opposition. We have now got rid of them.

C. Because they were against law.

'S. I am talking of facts only, as applied to the times, to the current of opinions, and the transactions of daily life. You must remember, when the newspapers were afraid to give us the debates in parliament, but under feigned names, or none at all, for fear of incurring a breach of privilege. But the members have wisely reflected,

flected, that as representatives of the nation, they ought not to conceal their opinions from their constituents : And now that breach of privilege is no more heard of. Here's an extension of that popular right, the liberty of the press.

C. Oh, sir, there's too much of that. It is not liberty, but licentiousness in these times.

'S. What would our grandfathers exclaim, upon hearing one arguing as you do, say that the press had too much liberty !

C. That is too strong an instance on your side ; I must be silent.

'S. We will go on. You remember when a tradesman could not get his debt from a parliament man, or his servant, without spending more than it was worth. And if you happened to break down a member's hedge, in hunting, or to catch a trout in his fishery, you were frightened out of your wits, for fear he should have you up to London, to answer for it in the parliament-house.

C. Remember it ! One of those journeys broke my poor father's heart. There was 'Squire Richman had him up for that very thing, and kept him in town all feed time. 'Twas his ruin : He never got the better of it.

'S. His son need not have any apprehensions on the same account : One example more on my side. There used to be great complaint made of the undue influence of revenue officers' votes in elections. Hereupon an act passed to take them away. Then followed an act to prevent Treasury contractors from sitting in parliament ; and another to restrain the King's power in granting pensions, and to diminish the influence of the crown in that respect. Do these instances convince you ?

C. Sir,

C. Sir, I find I must give up the dispute.

'S. Wait 'till you hear my concluding instance, in the libel bill of the last session, declaring and ascertaining the powers of Juries, against the improper influence of Judges. In this, every Englishman has real cause of triumph; for it was a contest between Liberty and Oppression; plain Truth against saucy Authority. And as for the consequences, I'll lay my life that no libeller will escape now from the good sense of a Jury, in the free exercise of that sense. But he often had a chance for it, when Judges entrapped their understandings in the snares of law.

C. Right, sir; and I am now ready to confess what you undertook to make me. But I wonder that you should say nothing of the history of the present prime minister: Is not that in your favour?

'S. I am better pleased that you should take it up so. Without doubt, it proves in a wonderful degree the indirect power of the people in this government. When we talk of the influence of the crown, we may sometimes safely rely upon the influence of the people to counterbalance it. To have the public administration directed by one whom the King appoints, on account of the general wish of the country from esteem of his talents, and to see him continue for many years in the same estimation, by the court and the nation, must give the most encouraging ideas of the free spirit of our constitution.

C. He has always been my favourite: Yet I expected that he would have done his utmost to bring about a reform of parliament. Surely it would do good.

'S. He may have done his utmost, for aught we know, and

and have found it impracticable. Every one admits it to be attended with many difficulties. I would not speak against this, for I believe it would do some good, though much less than the promoters of it expect. All that I wish to persuade myself and others, is, that in the present state of things, it is not necessary to our actual enjoyment of the principal advantages, which the best government on earth can confer upon its subjects: Personal liberty and safety; security in the enjoyment of property; and the happiness resulting from good order in society, and from the confidence that it will endure as long as we ourselves preserve a respect for the constitution, and require it from others.

C. These are good considerations, sir. I beg you will pardon my ignorance, which has given you so much trouble. I did not think such pains had been necessary to make us understand our happiness; which we may all discover so readily by our own feelings.

'S. Let me add, that the whole tenor of our government, since the revolution, exhibits a gradual progress of improvements; some without a call from the people, some upon their application. In all of which, it is remarkable, that the advantages gained by the subject have not lessened the necessary powers of the crown.

C. There's comfort in this reflection.

'S. It appears from the experience of this period, that something may be always gained in the same way by time, and without violence; which convinces me, that there is an active vigorous principle in the constitution, ever at work for our good: That very little activity on our part, is sufficient to keep that spirit in motion: But that overstrained exertions, and intemperate zeal, have sometimes oppressed and subdued it. Witness the last

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unsuccessful attempt of the Dissenters, for the repeal of the Test act. Their measures were so menacing—

C. Surely you will not be for the repeal.

'S. I suspect you, friend, on this question. The old proverb, you know, "Two of a trade—." But my wishes are only to reconcile a very dissatisfied body of men to the State, by an easy sacrifice. And I believe it would annihilate their political consequence, as a sect or party; which they seem little aware of.

C. I have no objection to that, in any way you please. Indeed I have known where people have lost all their importance, by losing their complaints. There's my brother Dick's widow; she got the good will of her neighbours in her husband's time, by telling long stories of his ill usage, and how much she suffered. No door in the parish was so crowded with gossips. But since the poor fellow's death, she has nothing to say for herself; and they pass the house now, without looking in at the window.

'S. Let me ask, if your neighbour the school-master may not act a little upon the same principle. Do you think my conversation with you, would have persuaded him likewise to think better of the times; and instead of finding faults in our constitution, to comfort himself in the enjoyment of its good parts, and in the comparison with other nations?

C. It has had that good effect on me, sir, and I thank you. I'll go to our next meeting for a different purpose from that it was intended for. I could wish you to honour us with your company. My neighbour is a cheerful man, and much may be done with him in good humour.

'S. Agreed;

"S. Agreed; and I will propose a resolution to support the King and Constitution.

C. I am confident it will pass unanimously. My toast shall be, "Confusion to all who wish it."

"S. And mine, "God save the King!"

At this time Mr. Pitt rose and said, "I have the following resolution to move, which I trust will be received with interest by your Lordships. It is as follows:

"Resolved, That we do most cordially approve and heartily thank the King for his speech from the Throne, and for his determination to make every exertion in his power to maintain the peace and tranquillity of the Kingdom, and to support the Constitution and Laws of the Country.

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THE END.